

UNIT I: INTRODUCTION

This unit addresses why students enroll in driver education and why the course is offered to them. The benefits of driving are identified, as are the risks involved. The goal of the course is delineated along with the student's responsibilities for achieving that goal.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

Knowledge Objectives

Students will know:

1. The State has a vested interest in enhancing and assuring traffic safety and efficiency.
2. The overinvolvement of youth in accidents.
3. The nature of course requirements.

Attitude Objectives

Students will accept that:

1. The paramount goal is for students to learn how to drive safely.
2. Driving is inherently dangerous.
3. Younger drivers are the group at highest hazard in traffic.

The entire unit may be covered through teacher presentation. However, teachers may wish to cover the area of "Why Students Take Driver Education" through class discussion, if only to signal to students that their active participation is expected and encouraged.

If time allows, the content presented in "Why Focus on Young Drivers" may be followed with a brief discussion of accident experience among students and their peers (classmates, teenaged relatives) to reinforce and personalize the fact that teenagers are at high risk in traffic.

RATIONALE FOR DRIVER EDUCATION

School and state have well-defined reasons for sponsoring driver education. Their reasons may differ slightly from students reasons for taking course.

Why Students Take Driver Education

Student's Motivations:

- Primary--to get license two years earlier than otherwise possible.
- Secondary--to qualify for motorist insurance discounts offered to approved-course graduates.

License valued because:

- Enhances independence -- no longer need to rely on others (parents, friends) for transportation.
- Enhances mobility -- expands area in which they can seek social or work opportunities.

Why School and State Provide Driver Education

School and State want young people to enjoy the independence and mobility they desire:

- Recognize the social and economic benefits of mobility.
- Benefit from individual's exercise of mobility, in terms of improved quality of life and economic development.

Local, state and federal governments have made enormous investment in highway transportation system to improve and facilitate mobility for all citizens.

However, State also responsible for public safety.

Consequently, State's goal is to provide highway transportation system that accommodates safe and efficient mobility.

HIGHWAY TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Highway transportation system comprises three parts:

- Roads
- Vehicles
- Drivers

Roads

Governments have made massive investment in roadways--highways, bridges, roads.

Governments have also invested heavily in hardware to help drivers use roadways:

- Safely--traffic control devices such as traffic lights, pavement markings, stop signs and warning signs.
- Efficiently--street signs, exit signs, alternative routes.

Vehicles are integral part of system and give it much of its diversity.

Vehicles

Roads accommodate all types of vehicles--cars, vans, trucks, motorcycles, mopeds and bicycles

Vehicles designed for different purposes, different jobs

Vehicle design differences yield different performance characteristics in:

- rates of acceleration
- stopping distances
- turning radiuses

These differences make for a complex driving environment.

To survive in this environment, drivers must be aware of vehicle performance limitations and how to respond to them.

Additionally, ill-maintained vehicles can cause accidents.

Government tries to reduce vehicle-imposed risks to some extent

- Provides restricted lanes and roads to separate speed differences (e.g., trucks relegated to right hand lanes on steep upgrades; bicycles and mopeds forbidden on highways)
- Law enforcement activities (e.g., issue tickets for dangerous equipment defects like burnt out lights, faulty exhaust systems)

However, ultimate responsibility for maintaining vehicle in safe condition lies with driver.

Drivers

Drivers are most critical and diverse element of highway transportation system.

Drivers vary greatly in terms of skill, knowledge, perception and judgment.

All these factors essential if driver is to use roadway and vehicle safely and efficiently.

Government seeks to assure safe, efficient driver performance by:

- Law enforcement--ticketing drivers who operate unsafely

- Driver improvement initiatives--providing instruction to traffic violators in effort to help them drive more safely
- Driver sanctions--suspending or revoking licenses of drivers who fail to operate at acceptable level of safety

State also tries to enable and foster safe driver performance by supporting driver education courses.

ORIGINS OF DRIVER EDUCATION

There is no real requirement for public schools to teach the mechanics of driving.

Informal Instruction

For decades, people learned to drive without formal driver education.

In 1930s - '40s, licenses given to anyone who could pass simple written and driving tests

- There was no minimum age requirement

- Licensure of 10 year olds not uncommon

As more and more roads were built (in the '40s) and more and more vehicles and drivers filled the roads:

- highway transportation system became far more complex
- traffic accident rates soared.

Public safety necessitated improvement and greater regulation of all system components.

High School Driver Education

First major initiative to improve driver performance was to introduce driver education to public schools.

To assure driver education would be available to all students, state funds were invested to reimburse school districts for offering driver ed.

Studies showing driver education graduates less likely to be involved in accidents subsequently led state to raise licensing age for those not taking driver education.

Driver education graduates are considered "lower risk" than those without formal training because driver education stresses development of perception and judgment, as well as knowledge and skill, which are not easily acquired except through experience.

Unfortunately, the experiences which teach unsafe drivers how to drive safely are primarily accidents.

The goal of driver education is to substitute classroom and behind the wheel learning experiences for the often lethal experiences of unsafe drivers.

WHY FOCUS ON YOUNG DRIVERS?

State focuses its education effort on young drivers because they are most at risk.

Driving is inherently dangerous for everyone

- More Americans killed or injured in traffic crashes than in all wars put together
- Traffic crashes are leading cause of accidental death, claiming 45,000 to 50,000 lives each year
- Another 2 million Americans are disabled each year in traffic crashes

Iowa drivers are no exception to the problem

- More than 200,000 accidents last year
- More than 12,000 injured each year
- More than 400 killed each year

Of all drivers, youngest are at greatest risk

- Traffic crashes account for nearly half of all deaths, ages 16-19
- 16-19 year olds are twice as likely to die in traffic crash as older people

This excessive risk also extends to teenage passengers

- Most teenage passengers killed were riding with teenage drivers at time of crash
- Driver education seeks to protect not only the students but friends who ride with them

Getting a license is one of the most dangerous things students will ever do.

WHAT THE COURSE WILL COVER

Course will teach what students need to learn and do to keep from killing or maiming themselves, their friends and other road users.

- how to avoid causing accidents.
- how to avoid accidents caused by mistakes of others.
- what kinds of hazards await students on the roads, how to find them, recognize them, and deal with them safely and efficiently.

COURSE GOAL

The goal of driver education goes far beyond teaching the simple mechanics of how to manipulate a car.

Goal is to enhance safety and efficiency of the entire highway transportation system by:

- Preventing accidents and injuries
- Increasing driver and passenger survivability in crashes.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES IN COURSE

Students will be:

- challenged to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge and skills needed to earn a license and acquire a greater freedom of mobility
- expected to develop the judgment and sense of responsibility needed to apply what they have learned throughout the rest of their driving career.